



JEFFERSON COUNTY VETERANS' SERVICES OFFICE



Yvonne Duesterhoeft

Veterans Service Officer
yvoned@jeffersoncountywi.gov

Ext. 7240

Courthouse, Room 207
320 S. Main Street
Jefferson, Wisconsin 53549
920-674-7240

Gene Asmann

Deputy Veterans
Service Officer

June 9, 2015

REPORT TO THE HONORABLE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, JEFFERSON COUNTY, WI

This office functions under the direction of the Veterans Service Officer, who is appointed by the County Administrator. Policy oversight for local aid to Veterans in need is provided by the County Veterans Service Commission.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

Chapter 45 of the WI Statutes requires each County to have a County Veterans Service Officer and establishes duties of the Veterans Service Officer. The position is funded by County tax revenue and offset by a \$13,000 annual grant provided through the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Trust Fund.

All Jefferson County resident veterans and their dependents may receive assistance through the Veterans' Service office. This office provides information and processes applications for both state and federal benefits such as disability compensation, non-service connected pension, VA healthcare, vocational training, educational programs, insurance, domiciliary care and burial benefits. Veterans and dependents experiencing temporary financial emergencies are assisted with funds from the Veterans Service Commission. In 2014, \$8,380.00 in Veterans Service Commission aid was expended in the form of gift cards for food and gas, payments directly utility providers, landlords, etc. We are fortunate to receive many donations from service organizations and private citizens which adds to the aid that can be passed on to Veterans in need.

Transportation of Veterans to the Madison VA Hospital is provided in partnership with the Federal VA through a Government Services Administration (GSA) contract which allows the County Veterans Service Office to lease an 8 passenger van for \$250 per month. The Federal VA covers the cost of fuel and vehicle maintenance; Jefferson County must provide the volunteer drivers. We are grateful to the Jefferson County Human Services Transportation Office for their assistance in coordinating the volunteer drivers and scheduling rides for veterans--and especially to the dedicated volunteer drivers who literally make the program go!

The Veterans Service Office makes every effort to get the message to all veterans as to available benefits and programs via radio, newspapers, personal contacts and various information booths. The service officer meets with Veterans and community organizations on a continuous basis. Whenever necessary, the service officer makes house calls to incapacitated, nursing home or housebound veterans.



A. ECONOMIC IMPACT OF VETERANS BENEFITS IN JEFFERSON COUNTY IN 2014

The 2014 economic impact statistics have not been released by the VA as of this date—however, according to the Federal Veterans Administration's *FY13 Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDX)* report), Jefferson County presently has an approximate resident population of 6,014 (live) veterans out of about 409,419 in Wisconsin. In addition to the Veterans themselves, other residents of Jefferson County are also potential recipients of veteran's benefits -- including veteran's spouses, dependent children and dependent parents. The economic impact to the county is substantial:

1. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is currently dispensing compensation and/or pension benefits to over 1,000 veterans, widows and families in Jefferson County. Although the 2014 statistics have not yet been released, the most current (FY13) report reflects that over 28 million dollars in federal financial benefits were paid to Jefferson County veterans through disability compensation, pensions, education, vocational rehabilitation, health care and life insurance. The exact numbers will soon be posted in the *FY14 Summary of Expenditures by County* report which can be found at: <http://www.va.gov/vetdata/> .

2. The State of Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs dispensed \$19,320.99 of financial benefits to Jefferson County veterans in 2014. Of that, \$6,625.00 was granted as subsistence aid to veterans who lost work due to an illness or injury, \$8,521.00 in dental/health care aid grants, and \$4,174.99 was awarded in education grants (not including the value of tuition remission provided under the WI GI Bill.)

These figures also don't include state funds expended for care of Jefferson County residents at the Wisconsin Veteran's Home at King, and Union Grove, Wisconsin—or the value of property tax remitted to 100% service-disabled veterans. The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs personal/home improvement loan programs continue to be in hiatus due to lack of funding.

B. MAJOR TRENDS IN THE VETERANS SERVICE BUSINESS

The Federal VA continues the march toward paperless claims—but it has not yet become the standard. We are still filing paper claims—but in theory—if the bugs can be worked out of the VA's software system in 2015—it will be possible for Veterans' advocates to assist the Veterans in submitting a digital claims. Up to this point--the VA's attempt to have individual Veterans apply for benefits online has been less than successful because many Veterans are confused by the array of documentation needed to support the disability claim. Because the individual Veteran is not an expert on what or how issues can be claimed—the outcome of their claim may be a lower (or denied) benefit. The value of the County Veteran Service office is our ability to help navigate the VA system. We continue to scan all incoming and outgoing mail and uploading it to our online VETRASPEC database. This technology has improved our efficiency in that we are able to call up a veterans file with a moment's notice if they phone or stop by.

Another key focus of the Federal VA is its initiative to end homelessness in the Veteran population by 2015. Our office partners with the Community Action Coalition through a grant program since it was initiated in 2012. The Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) provides case management and temporary financial assistance to low-income veterans (single individuals and those with families) to help them maintain stable housing.

C. MILESTONES MARKED IN 2014



We are proud to announce that Jefferson County Veterans now have a private counseling room to meet with counselors from the Madison Vet Center and the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Representative from the Department of Workforce Development. This renovation of the back half of our file room was made possible when our scanning project was completed and the filing cabinets could be disposed of—freeing up the space for a higher and better use. We will be having an official unveiling of the facility in 2015.

Our mass-mailing in April of 2014 increased our traffic exponentially, although much of our traffic is the result of the overall increased level of publicity about Veteran's issues and benefits -- which has lead Veterans of all eras to seek assistance for the first time or to return after many years due to a change in life-circumstance.

As operations in Iraq and Afghanistan conclude and the military personnel numbers draw down—we would expect a corresponding increase in the number of Veterans seeking our services. We continue to do outreach at the Jefferson County Fair as well as other events during the year.



Respectfully Submitted,

Yvonne R. Dusterhoft